

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Physical Education
REPORT**

**Gonzaga College SJ
Sandford Road, Dublin 8
Roll number: 60530S**

Date of inspection: 27 April 2010



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Gonzaga College. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Physical Education and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over one day during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and their teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the subject teachers and the principal. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Gonzaga College is a Jesuit school for boys with a current enrolment of 542 students. It has a strong academic tradition and offers three curricular programmes: the Junior Certificate, a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme, and the established Leaving Certificate. It is commendable that Physical Education is a core subject for all students and enjoys a healthy status in the school. All junior cycle and Leaving Certificate classes are timetabled for eighty minutes of Physical Education per week, which is provided as two single-period lessons. TY students receive one single period per week for Physical Education and are also timetabled for a treble period one afternoon per week for physical activity modules, which are organised as part of the physical education programme. The time allocation for TY students is exemplary. Although Physical Education enjoys a high profile in the school, the time allocated to the subject for junior cycle and Leaving Certificate students is less than the recommended two hours per student per week as outlined in the *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools*. Furthermore, the timetabling of single-period lessons for Physical Education may impose significant restrictions on the depth of engagement in practical activities and learning possible in each lesson. It is acknowledged that some consideration has been given to the timetabling of double periods for physical education classes, but timetable constraints continue to militate against this provision. As part of the school's next curriculum review process, it is recommended that management review the timetabling of single-period lessons in favour of at least one double period per week for each class group to allow for greater indepth engagement with the subject matter. Management is also encouraged to work towards providing the subject for all students in line with the recommendations of the Department.

The school employs three teachers with responsibility for delivering the physical education curriculum, all of whom are graduates of the subject. The physical education teachers are also centrally involved in the organisation and delivery of the school's extracurricular physical activity and sports programmes. Engagement in continuing professional development (CPD) is supported

by school management, which also contributes to the cost of affiliation to the Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI) and relevant courses upon request. Teachers have recently undertaken some professional development in a number of sport-specific areas and in first aid. However, it is regrettable that the school did not engage in the professional development programme for the implementation of the revised physical education syllabus, which was provided by the Junior Cycle Physical Education Support Service (JCPESS). To support the work of the physical education department in their planning and pedagogy, it would be beneficial to consult the website of the PEA I (www.peai.org) to identify the range of professional development events and courses available through the local community of practice. The JCPESS website (www.jcpe.ie) is also a useful reference to access resources and materials that support professional development and the planning and implementation of the revised syllabus.

The trustees have recently made a significant investment in upgrading and extending the existing sports facilities. As a result, the school has a range of high quality and excellently maintained facilities to support the delivery of the physical education and extracurricular sports programmes. These include a large indoor sports hall complete with a climbing wall, a strength-and-conditioning facility consisting of resistance and cardio-vascular equipment, four playing pitches, tennis courts and a synthetic-surface playing pitch, in addition to a suite of changing rooms. The provision and maintenance of these facilities and resources to support students' engagement in sport and physical activity is exemplary. Health-and-safety issues are well addressed and it was reported that an audit of the facilities, equipment and procedures is conducted at regular intervals, in keeping with good practice.

A dedicated office and changing facilities are also available to support the work of the physical education teachers. A range of resources to support teaching and learning is available and these items are neatly stored in the office. A large storeroom adjacent to the sports hall also hosts a range of equipment and materials to support the delivery of the programmes for each year group. A budget system is in place to support the purchase of additional or replacement items of equipment and resources and this was reported to work well. There is good access to information and communication technology (ICT), including data projectors, media players and digital technology. Broadband access is available in the physical education office and sports hall, which is a valuable resource to support the research, planning and delivery of the subject.

There is a broad range of extracurricular physical activities and sports provided by the school. While rugby is the principal sport provided, students may also participate in a number of other sports including athletics, badminton, basketball, cricket, hurling, table tennis, tennis and ultimate frisbee. Students are also facilitated to represent the school at inter-schools' golf competitions. The students' achievements in some of the sports provided are to a very high standard. Many opportunities are provided for students to participate in physical activity at a level commensurate with their ability, while the school endeavours to provide activities and sports to meet the interests of students. This is commendable as it ensures that all students can develop the competence and confidence to engage in physical activity and to accrue the many benefits that may arise from their participation. Opportunities such as the *Panthers* social rugby, ultimate frisbee and badminton, which are organised at a recreational level, serve to meet the interests of many students, who may not be competitively motivated, and ensures that they equally appreciate and value physical activity. The involvement of the physical education teachers and of additional staff members in the organisation and coaching of all the sports and physical activities provided is highly commended.

Engagement in sport and physical activity is visibly promoted in the school, with representative jerseys and photographs of players and athletes prominently displayed. Such displays contribute to the promotion of a culture of physical activity and achievement in the school.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

At present, no formal structures are in place to support the subject department planning process for Physical Education. As the subject teachers share an office, they meet and collaborate on a daily basis to discuss the organisation of classes and the sharing of facilities, resources and equipment. While this forms the basis of a well-run physical education department, there is a need for structures to support the development of the subject and to provide an overarching framework for its delivery in the school. Formal structures will also ensure that management is regularly informed of any issues impacting on the future organisation, content and delivery of the subject. As an initial step to developing the subject department planning process, a subject co-ordinator, with a clear role description, should be appointed to lead the subject department. It is best practice that this role be rotated at agreed intervals between all members of the subject department. A schedule of formal meetings should be agreed to provide opportunities for the subject department to review, plan and implement the agreed programmes of work and to identify areas for development in the future delivery of the subject. Time should be devoted during subject department meetings to discuss pedagogy, including the variety of strategies to support students' engagement in the learning process. Such strategies may include assessment-for-learning practices, using the games-for-understanding approach, the integration of ICT to augment the learning process and the greater inclusion of the principles of physical development into each of the planned activity strands.

There is a need for a written subject plan to be developed by the physical education department, which should document all aspects relevant to the organisation and delivery of the subject in the school. This plan should include timetable provision and arrangements, staff and professional development, the facilities, equipment and resources available to support teaching and learning, the programmes of work for each year group. The plan should also detail the strategies and resources to support the inclusion of students of all ability levels, the assessment process, cross-curricular links, health-and-safety procedures and the process for self-review and monitoring the effectiveness of the physical education programme in the school. This plan should clearly identify the learning outcomes for year group and connect these to the programme content, teaching and learning methods, and forms of assessment. Ongoing review and updating will ensure that the plan informs and guides the delivery of the subject and ensure that students achieve the best possible learning outcomes.

The physical education department has developed an agreed programme of work for each year group. This document outlines the activity modules and briefly lists the basic content and desired outcomes for each year group. It is commendable that teachers collaborated and agreed on the implementation of a common programme as this ensures consistency in its delivery and in the learning experiences of students. The activity modules planned for each year group in junior cycle and Leaving Certificate indicates that a relatively broad range of activities, incorporating most strands of the relevant syllabuses, are provided for. Consideration should be given to including the use of the school's strength-and-conditioning facilities into the programmes of work, especially at senior cycle. The diversity of the planned activities ensures that students have opportunities to acquire and develop a good understanding of human functionality and performance, and a range of skills to inform their participation in physical activity and sport. As an addition to their physical education programme, a trip to an outdoor education centre is

included for first-year students, as a means of helping these students to develop friendships through engaging together in a variety of challenging activities. This is a very worthwhile initiative. The TY physical education programme offers students a broad range of diverse activities. The provision of some activity modules on an optional basis acknowledges the maturity of these students and gives them a sense of ownership over their physical education programme. Many of the activities are in keeping with the aims of the TY programme and contribute to students' personal development. The use of external leisure and recreation facilities, including an outdoor education centre and a local sailing venue, increases students' knowledge of the various physical-activity opportunities that are available to them.

To build on the programme planning already in place, it is recommended that the programme of work be further developed in greater detail, within the context of an overall subject plan. The purpose of this work should be to inform and guide the delivery of each activity module, and to ensure coherence and progression in students' learning throughout their physical education programme. A number of well developed schemes of work, although outdated and specific to other schools, are stored in files in the physical education office and would provide a useful basis to begin the development of informed plans. A number of planning templates and resources are also available on the JCPESS website to assist the physical education department in this task.

There was a very good standard of individual planning for each of the physical education lessons observed over the course of the inspection.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

There was a very good standard of teaching and learning in the physical education lessons observed. Lessons were very well organised and efficient systems are in place to optimise the time available for learning. Following roll call, teachers set the context for the topic and shared the purpose of the lessons with their students. Good practice was observed when teachers also established the desired learning outcomes with their students and these were expressed in terms of the knowledge and skills that students were expected to acquire and develop as a result of their engagement. It is recommended that this good practice be adopted for all lessons. The provision of a white board in the sports hall should be considered as this is often a useful tool to assist the teaching and learning process.

In the lessons visited, the topics taught were badminton, volleyball, and sprinting and throwing in athletics. Practical tasks commenced with purposeful warm-up activities. Exemplary practice was observed when senior cycle students took ownership of their own warm-up routines. On entering the sports hall, senior students, without instruction, began by jogging around the perimeter and commenced a series of general mobility activities. Once all students were present and had spent sufficient time at the physiological phase of the warm-up, they then progressed to the joint-mobility phase. Students correctly identified the correct muscle groups and the associated exercises, which were executed with good technical competence and ensured each joint was worked through its full range of motion. Providing students with opportunities to lead their peers and apply their learning was done to very good effect and is highly commended. In other lessons, students' understanding of the purpose and structure, and the relevant physiological and anatomical aspects, of warming-up prior to intense physical activity, was enhanced through effective questioning. As part of the final phase of the warm-up, students were given several opportunities to practise and develop the required patterns of movement for the basic skills of the activity. The structure, organisation and execution of these initial activities are commended as they ensures that students learn to apply the principles associated with preparation for

engagement in vigorous physical activity, by working through the appropriate phases of a warm-up.

Lessons developed through a well-ordered, progressive and sequential approach, where tasks increased in their complexity and intensity. All instructions were clear and precise. Key technical points were delivered in a language that was accessible and appropriate to students' age and ability, and provided them with an appropriate level of detail concerning matters such as the mechanics involved in the production and transfer of force in throwing events, the basic biomechanics of sprinting and developing a tactical approach in games playing. Teachers encouraged students to focus on developing their technical competency through the provision of cues to enhance their kinaesthetic awareness. This is good practice. Questioning was used to good effect in all lessons to engage students cognitively by involving them in movement analysis of focused skills and in problem solving in tactical situations.

Peer-review was used to good effect in some lessons where students were asked to provide feedback to improve their partner's technique. This valuable strategy was most effective in improving students' learning when two to three key performance indicators were given to guide their analysis and ensure their feedback was clearly focused. Students' were also given sufficient time and subsequent opportunities to apply the feedback to improve their performances.

All lessons had a good commitment to high levels of physical activity and were well paced. Students were kept on task throughout their lesson through a range of effective strategies that involved a good balance between instruction and activity, optimum work-to-rest ratios and appropriate group size for the set task. The level of physical activity and the progress made during single-period lessons were impressive given the short amount of time available. However, students would have benefited from more time to fully develop their competencies and understanding of the focused topics and concepts. Students obviously enjoyed their lessons and were often only beginning to become fully involved in applied or vigorous activity when it was time to finish the lesson. The provision of appropriate amounts of time for physical education lessons in all year groups can be expected to overcome this issue and help to ensure a more fulfilling teaching and learning experience.

Questioning was very effectively used at the end of the lessons to consolidate students' learning. In keeping with good practice, teachers also indicated the topic of the next lesson, which further reinforced students' sense of continuity in their learning. Students were most co-operative, attentive and fully engaged in all of the planned activities. Teachers have established a positive rapport with their students and were affirming of all efforts made during the lesson.

ASSESSMENT

Teachers maintain records of students' attendance and participation in all physical education lessons and these, together with informal assessment through observation and questioning, are used to provide feedback to parents at parent-teacher meetings.

There is a need to bring increased formality to the assessment process in Physical Education. The physical education department should plan and implement a common approach to the formal assessment of practical and theoretical learning. An effective assessment process should ensure that students undertake a number of assessment events, both practical and written, at key stages throughout their programme of work. This can be achieved by expanding the use of self-assessment and peer-assessment strategies, the completion of rich tasks and key assignments at

the end of each module of learning and the inclusion of a practical performance component at least once a year. In this way students' practical performance, movement-analysis ability and knowledge and understanding of the material covered can be assessed in an incremental and informative manner. The development of an efficient system of retaining relevant records of students' work is also important to ensure that the assessment process can be implemented effectively. An effective assessment system will provide valuable feedback to teachers as to the success of the physical education programme and will inform future planning. The use of assessment-for-learning methodologies will provide teachers' with the basis to guide students regarding their progress and areas for improvement. Information regarding the development of an assessment process for Physical Education can be obtained from www.jcpe.ie.

Students' progress in Physical Education should also form part of school reports that are sent to parents. It is important that the substantial learning which is taking place in physical education lessons in Gonzaga College is acknowledged and validated.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- All students are provided with timetabled Physical Education, which is delivered by appropriately qualified teachers.
- Excellent facilities are available to support the delivery of the physical education, school sport and physical activity programmes.
- The physical education department is well resourced.
- The planned programmes of work provide students with a diversity of physical activity experiences.
- There is a good range of physical activity modules and courses planned for TY in keeping with the ethos of the programme.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Physical Education was very good and lessons were characterised by high levels of student engagement.
- Lessons were well structured and appropriately paced, and a good range of effective teaching strategies was evident in the lessons observed. Students were physically and cognitively involved in their learning through progressive and challenging tasks.
- Physical education lessons took place in an atmosphere of mutual respect between teacher and student.
- All students have access to a broad range of sports and physical activities as part of the school's extracurricular programme, commensurate with their interests and abilities.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that management review the timetabling of single-period lessons in favour of at least one double period per week for each class group. Management is also encouraged to work towards providing the subject for all students in line with the recommendations of the Department.
- The subject department planning process for physical education should be further developed and a collaborative and comprehensive subject plan should be developed by the physical education department.
- The development of the assessment process in Physical Education and a system of retaining students' work are recommended.

- Comments on students' progress in their physical education programme should be included in the school's reports to parents.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the subject teachers and also with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

Published November 2010.